



THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

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Introduction:

- He is the presiding officer of the House of Commons.
- In the early days of the House, he speaker alone had the right to speak for his fellow members & therefore called as speaker.
- Sir Thomas Hungerford was the first speaker chosen in 1377.
- In the beginning, the King used to appoint the speaker, later on it became a elective office.

Election:

- The first task that the House of Commons does is to elect the speaker, immediately after general elections.
- His election is unanimous one.
- Usually the name of the speaker is proposed by the government and seconded by the opposition.

Qualification:

- He must be a member of the House.
- Many other qualities like the knowledge of rules and practices of the House, good voice, tact, vigilance, impartiality, sense of humor, self confidence etc.

Term:

- He is elected for the full term of the House.
- He continues to be a speaker even after the dissolution of the House, until a new house is elects its speaker.
- Once a speaker always be a speaker – may be re-elected as the speaker if he is re-elected to the House as its member.

His functions & powers:

- His powers/functions are as follows –
 1. Presiding over the House,
 2. Conducting debates,
 3. Announcement of results,
 4. Certifying money bills,
 5. Power of Kangaroo Closure,
 6. Protection of privileges,
 7. Represents the House, etc.

I. Presiding over the House:

- He presides over the meetings of the House except when it sits as a committee of the whole House
- He decides about who must speak first.
- All speeches of the members are addressed to the chair
- He maintains the decorum of the House.
- He maintains order & discipline in the house.
- He expunges unparliamentary words and behavior.
- He may even adjourn the House if disorder persists.

2. Conducting Debates:

- He has to conduct the debates & is regarded as the 'Lord of Debates'.
- He has to see that the debate centers around the main issues before the house.
- He has to interpret the law which regulate the procedure of the speech.
- Speakers rulings are final.

3. Announcement of Results:

- He announces the results of voting that takes place on various legislative measures introduced in the House of Commons.
- He has a casting vote in case of a tie.
- He can also prevent any question being put to vote.
- He also decides whether to admit or rule out amendments.

4. Certifying Money bills:

- He is empowered to certify whether a bill is a money bill or not. Since money bills can be introduced only in the Lower House (Act of 1911).
- Allocation of bills is also done by the speaker amongst the various standing committees

5. Power of kangaroo Closure:

- Due to limited time at the disposal of the House, it may not be possible to discuss all the bills clause by clause.
- This closure takes place when the speaker is empowered to select only those clauses and amendments which he considers more essential for discussion.
- Here it is left to the speaker to select the amendments which are made at the reporting stage.

6. Protection of Privileges:

- He protects the privileges of the members of the House.
- When a minister refuses to answer the questions or do not give sufficient information speaker interferes & enforces the rights of the members against the executive.
- Thus, speaker is the guardian of the dignity of the House.

7. Represents the House:

- he is the constitutionally recognized spokesman of the House.
- He is the link between the king and the House.
- He is the ceremonial head of the House.
- He will remedy the grievances of the members.
- When any member dies or resigns his seat, it is the speaker who declares in the House that seat as vacant.

Conclusion:

- Apart from the above the speaker is authorized to summon a special session of the House, when a crisis occurs.
- Speaker has to act impartially like a judge of the Supreme Court.
- He is not a leader but an umpire.
- His position is one of dignity and prestige.